



Reframing climate change as a public health issue: An exploratory study of public reactions

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Climate change is taking a toll on human health, and some leaders in the public health community have urged their colleagues to give voice to its health implications. Previous research has shown that Americans are only dimly aware of the health implications of climate change, yet the literature on issue framing suggests that providing a novel frame--such as human health--may be potentially useful in enhancing public engagement. We conducted an exploratory study in the United States of people's reactions to a public health-framed short essay on climate change. **METHODS:** U.S. adult respondents (n Euro Surveillance (Bulletin European Sur Les Maladies Transmissibles; European Communicable Disease Bulletin) 70), stratified by six previously identified audience segments, read the essay and were asked to highlight in green or pink any portions of the essay they found "especially clear and helpful" or alternatively "especially confusing or unhelpful." Two dependent measures were created: a composite sentence-specific score based on reactions to all 18 sentences in the essay; and respondents' general reactions to the essay that were coded for valence (positive, neutral, or negative). We tested the hypothesis that five of the six audience segments would respond positively to the essay on both dependent measures. **RESULTS:** There was clear evidence that two of the five segments responded positively to the public health essay, and mixed evidence that two other responded positively. There was limited evidence that the fifth segment responded positively. Post-hoc analysis showed that five of the six segments responded more positively to information about the health benefits associated with mitigation-related policy actions than to information about the health risks of climate change. **CONCLUSIONS:** Presentations about climate change that encourage people to consider its human health relevance appear likely to provide many Americans with a useful and engaging new frame of reference. Information about the potential health benefits of specific mitigation-related policy actions appears to be particularly compelling. We believe that the public health community has an important perspective to share about climate change, a perspective that makes the problem more personally relevant, significant, and understandable to members of the public.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2898822>

Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change;
 surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

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Communication Audience: ☒

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

Exposure : ☒

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Air Pollution, Extreme Weather Event, Food/Water Quality, Food/Water Quality, Temperature, Unspecified Exposure

Air Pollution: Allergens

Food/Water Quality: Pathogen, Pathogen, Pathogen, Pathogen

Temperature: Fluctuations

Geographic Feature: ☒

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location: ☒

resource focuses on specific location

United States

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation): ☒

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact: ☒

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Cancer, Cardiovascular Effect, Diabetes/Obesity, Mental Health/Stress, Morbidity/Mortality, Other Health Impact

Cardiovascular Effect: Other Cardiovascular Effect

Cardiovascular Disease (other): Heart disease

Other Health Impact: Well-being

Mitigation/Adaptation: ☒

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Mitigation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern: ☒

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populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Children, Elderly, Low Socioeconomic Status, Racial/Ethnic Subgroup

Other Racial/Ethnic Subgroup: Minorities; Indigenous populations

Other Vulnerable Population: Pre-existing medical conditions; Disabled; Socially isolated; Inadequate housing; Inadequate access to basic services; Inadequate access to healthcare

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified